

Aleksandra Krajnović, PhD

University of Zadar
Department of Economics, Republic of Croatia
E-mail: akrajnov@unizd.hr

Monika Hordov, mag. oec.

University of Zadar
Department of Economics, Republic of Croatia
E-mail: mhordov@unizd.hr

Matea Župnek, mag. oec.

University of Zadar
Department of Economics, Republic of Croatia
E-mail: mzapnek@student.unizd.hr

CHILDREN AS A TARGET MARKET IN THE BRANDING PROCESS WITH EMPHASIS ON ETHICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

Technological innovations in communication and distribution of information have changed the way in which a relationship with clients is nurtured. Expectations of customers have grown considerably over time so companies have to work hard to attract them and build a brand. In process of building strong relationship with clients firms use media and send messages to the end – users, and more often – kids. That is happening because children and teenagers have a major impact on family purchases. Brands become a part of their personality, and building loyalties is growing rapidly in teenage years. Firms engage psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists to get deeper into their heads and achieve as tight a relationship with children. The desire for profit can be attributed to unethical behaviour, hence the existence of numerous legal and ethic restrictions for children does not guarantee protection. But, some countries have have completely banned advertising to children under the age of 12. In the short term, it may also make sense, but in long run when children have unlimited Internet access where advertising can hardly be controlled, these children have no one who can protects them. In these paper the influence of brands on the behaviour of children will be explored and it will examine the ethical aspects of advertising to children.

Keywords: *children as target market, branding for children, advertising for children*

1. INTRODUCTION

For every manufacturer, the main goal is to sell the product to as many people as possible to achieve profit. In order to succeed, manufacturer need to inform potential clients about his products, then convince them that they need their product in everyday life. In order for the manufacturer to know

who should be informed, the market have to be explored. Besides that he has to follow consumer's desires and financial possibilities. However, marketing theory and practice has determined that consumer's desires and financial possibilities change with life expectancy, and marketing specialists have been particularly interested in the role and impact of children when purchasing a wide range of products and services. This market has become interesting because today it is commonly known that children and teenagers have major impact on family purchases and they are considered the fastest growing market segments.

This paper will examine how big brands take care of their youngest clients – children, how their strategy of creating brand is focused on children, and how much children are perceived as the target market. In this paper it will be also determined which marketing trends aimed at children are popular in the world and to determine how media influence on the behaviour of children in purchasing goods and their impact on parents' buying. The aim of this research is also to highlight the future of marketing communication with children in the right way. Along with this, we have explored sustainability and ethics in relationship between media and children as one of the most vulnerable groups exposed to media content.

In this paper we will explore the following:

1. First chapter is introduction in our theme and answers on questions as what is main goal for every manufacturer and how big brands take care of their youngest clients – children.
2. In the second chapter we will explore children as target market and their power to influence parent purchases.
3. In the third and fourth chapter we will explore why children become one of the main interests of contemporary marketing and the brand awareness of children and how brand and licensed mascots are persuasive and powerful tool for marketing to children.
4. In fifth chapter we will explore which are the most important ethical issues and controversies in marketing advertising and branding toward children.
5. In sixth chapter we will present the legal regulation and explore is legal regulation sufficiently developed.

The data necessary for this research will be collected from secondary sources by browsing the Internet and Internet databases as well as the expert literature, by analyzing strategic documents and statistical data.

2. CHILDREN AS THE TARGET MARKET

When marketing is addressed to children as a target market, everyone usually think about advertising toys and sweets, but today marketers are increasingly focusing on advertising other products for children, such as clothing, footwear, sports equipment, but also products intended for adults like cars and credit cards. This is very important since it has been established that 50% of new products on the market are integrated into the family precisely thanks to children. This happens because children want to keep up with the novelty in order to integrate into society and with this wish they come to parents who have the purchasing power and can fulfill their wishes. (Somesfalean, 2012.)

Marketers are considering children not only as existing consumers but also as future consumers. They do that because of the discretionary income of children and their power to influence parent purchases and also because enormous increase in the number of available Television channel has led to smaller audience for each channel, thereby creating a growing space for children and children's products. Parents always ask their children for advice about purchasing. From vacations choices to car purchase, to meal selection and so on. They really have power over the family finances. The survey indicates parents' strong desire to prepare their children for adulthood. Children are being turned into consumers at a very early age through the desires and

with the encouragement of their parents, who also provide the financial support in the form of pocket money. (Gupta, 2011.) Parents ask the children's opinions for certain categories of products, as food products, toileters, games, books and toys, clothing or footwear, gades, IT school supplies primarily for personal use. Also parents are accompanied by their children when doing shopping, and they ask them about purchase products that are not currently part of children's area of interests, but they develop preferences for them over time for example smell of laundry detergent, color of soap and so on. (Aldea, Brandabur, 2015.)

Göksel, Baytekin, Maden (2013.) say that children take a role in the marketing scene by affecting their families' purchases, by becoming consumers on their own and by representing a future market. Right along with children's close relationship with marketing starting in their first year of existence, current kods usage of Internet, other media and their effects on children consumer behaviour rise the importance of children marketing.

In order to show the extent of spending on children and their impact on purchasing, it can be pointed out that in France 50% of the cost in family is made up of products for children (Moreau, 2008.), and cost categories will be shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Cost categories

Category	The amount in euros
Toys	Over 2 billion a year
Food	Over 4,5 billion a year
Clothes	4 billion a year

Source: Authors' table

School was previously a place where children were somehow protected from advertising, but today it is no longer a case because many brands "force" schools to allow them advertising in exchange, for example, new computers, money for educational material and so on. It should not be forgotten that children are increasingly using new technologies such as the Internet so brands can easily become part of children's lives. (Foehr, Rideout, 2005.) Brand to be able to increase profits relies on two new types of customers: those who leave the competition and those who have not yet entered the market. It is considered that those who leave the competition will be less faithful than those who are growing up with the brand. Evidence how far did it go, are the words that are pronounced by the president of Prism Communications: "They are not children so much as what we like to call them "evolving consumers". (Beder, 1998.)

3. BRANDING FOR CHILDREN

Recent research shows that marketing experts are increasingly pointing to children as target market and children become one of the main interests of contemporary marketing, not only because that is an easy way to attract adults but because they are a major and significant market. (Kuterovac, Jagodić, 2005.) Precisely because of this, many people criticize media that they do not allow children to enjoy their childhood. That is because media are promoting sex, violence, drugs, fast food, false values and so on. (Buchingham, 2007.)

Numerous of researchers investigate the brand awareness of children, and their conclusions were that as the children grew older, the number of the brand names and products that the children remembered increased. Aktas et al in their research found out that children were more successful at remembering the products than remembering the brand names. That means that children associate the brand logo with the product belonging to the brand. Also, authors found out that the children were successful at remembering the brands that are targeted at them. The brand names and the products that children most remember were a snack brand *Cheetos* and toy brands *Winx* and *Hotwheels*. That is because children use those brands in their daily lives and

always see the logos of those brands in addition to seeing them on television commercials. (Aktaş, Tas, Oğul, 2016.) In their research, The European Consumer Organisation found out that brand and licensed mascots are persuasive and powerful tool for marketing to children. They are often used on packaging of food products and on TV or games. Problem is that, for example, food companies often use licensed mascots to promote foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar as defined by the WHO nutritional criteria. Instead, they should promote healthier foods to children. Food companies should be very careful because brand mascots and licensed media characters often evoke a sense of fun, humour or adventure copying common themes in popular children's programmes and because of that children have an initiative to ask their parents to buy them that products. That is very big problem because children develop emotional bonds with personified characters as if they were their friends.

It should be emphasized that most of the marketing effects of marketing toward children are focused on the effects of food and beverage advertising. Especially newest researchers research that theme. A good example is the recent research carried out by Cairns et al who pointed out that *food promotions have a direct effect on children's nutrition knowledge, preferences, purchase behaviour, consumption patterns and diet-related health. Current marketing practice predominantly promotes low nutrition foods and beverages.*

Regarding the legislation on the promotion of food and drink for children, there are some more research in the following articles:

Hawkes, Lobstein (2010.) *describe the global regulatory environment around food marketing to children in 2009 and they identified changes in this environment.*

Seideres, Petty (2007.) *explore the policy implications of the findings in this special section for potential remedies and opportunities for further research in the critical area of obesity.*

Harris, Graff (2011.) *say that food marketing targeted to children almost exclusively promotes calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods and takes advantage of children's vulnerability to persuasive messages.*

Raine et al (2013.) *explore that obesity presents major challenges for public health and the evidence is strong. Lessons from tobacco control indicate a need for changing the policy and environments to make healthy choices easier and to create more opportunities for children to achieve healthy weights.*

Furthermore, children can't distinguish advertising and entertainment programmes marketing tools, so brand mascots can strongly influence them. Besides that, researches show that using brand mascots during childhood can persist into adulthood. That is "brand loyalty". This demonstrates that even grown adults with developed cognitive ability to understand advertising can still be affected by positive associations linked to brand mascots initiated in childhood. All that could make parents more receptive to a child's purchase requests for the same brand. That is proof that mascots affect consumer behaviour. For example, in UK, a breakfast cereal decided to not only bring back their mascot, they also decided to change the cereal's name to include reference to the mascot. That has sparked the strong feelings of nostalgia, trust and loyalty. (The European Consumer Organisation, 2017.) Furthermore, every marketing specialist is focusing more and more on the family segment as a specific consumer group because it is very profitable segment that buy and spend a large amount of money. However, marketers need to know, understand and consider that this segment has its own rules when they are making a purchase decision so they can attract and retain this segment. (Kasić, 2011.) Children and teenagers can have significant impact on budget allocation, and along with that the birth of the baby is a big event that creates the need for new, wide assortment of products that has not been within the family budget so far. (Peter, 2005.) The proof for this is a study that children also affect sales of cars worth 9 billion dollars a year. One car dealer even explains: "Sometimes the child is literally our buyer. I watched the child choose the

car.” This means that even car industry should not ignore children in marketing campaigns. (Beder, 1998.) Some of the examples will be shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Examples of car compaigns that include children

Brand	Marketing campaign
Nissan	Sponsorship of the American Football Team of Youth
Chrysler	Distribution more than 100.000 carton pop-up books by mail
Chevrolet	Advertisements with children in them

Source: Authors’ table

Critics of consumer culture who believe that children are passive victims in all this, often emphasize parents’ concerns to their children, because of that brands should know that children and parents should like advertisers. In fact, parents are actually on the edge of two extremely important things, on the one hand they want to give their children a real example and protect them from bad influences, and on the other hand they want them to develop their own personality using new and popular things. Another today problem is that parents spend more and more time working to ensure a decent life for their children so they are trying to replace lost time and lack of attention by purchasing things that children want.

4. BRAND STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN – CHILD-CENTERED MARKETING

When it comes to so-called *child-centered marketing*, the first thing that comes to mind is moral criticism because neither products nor services should be sold to children, and children should not be targeted in marketing because they have not built identity and opinion, which is why they are easily affected by brands. Besides that, marketing experts in the new strategies use psychological conseling to understand children, and that is very controversial. (Feloni, 2013.)

Many brands also use marketing tricks in advertising to children. These are the psychology and packaging of products. Regarding psychology, brands rely on the fact that children will “annoy” their parents until they buy them what children want and on that, brands are building their own strategy. Furthemore, the packaging of products are colorful and have distinctive mascots because that is what children prefer. Today, great influence on product advertising have influencers, those are the young men and women who publish personal photos on the Internet with certain product. They often publish videos about how to use a particular product and that product become popular product and that product become popular because young people prefer a product that is used by people similar to them, rather than celebrities. It is important that parents are constantly researching baby products because they want to buy the best products on the market so they could protect their babies against products with poor quality. They do that by browsing product websites, reviews, consumer reports and more. A particularly vulnerable group are couples who become parents for the first time because they easily fall under the influence of a particular company from which they receive information on a daily basis. This is very important because, according to the research in the period from 2008. to 2010. it is noticeable that expenditures increased by 13% on baby clothes, and that proves that the baby’s clothing has become a status symbol, claims Barford (2011.)

5. ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN BRANDING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN

In today’s world, it is very important that child care extends beyond the close family. It must be emphasized how neighbourhood or community can have a strong impact on the growth and development of children and besides that today that is all moved to digital world as a result of

which children are daily bombarded with messages that brands can improve their lives, but just because brands want to sell their products. (Linn, 2010.) Commercialization and digitalization has led to many public and health problems that children are facing like juvenile narcotization, tobacco use, eating disorders, and violence, and all that is related to advertising and marketing. The problem is also that the fundamental message of advertising has become that we should buy products because that will make us happy, which ultimately leads to over-buying which leads to depression and low self-esteem in children. (Linn, 2010.) Thanks to the easier access to television channels, radio stations and web sites, big brands can send informations to a younger audience faster and easier. Another problem is that, despite the fact that American Pediatrics Academy (2005.) recommends that children younger than 2 years are not allowed to watch television, Zimmerman, Christakis and Meltzoff (2007.) prove that 40% of three-month-olds in United States regularly watch TV programs or DVDs for up to 45 minutes a day, on the other hand, Rideout and Hammel (2007.) in their paper say that 19% of children under one year have a TV in their bedroom. Along with that, mobile phones have become one of the most important platforms that target young people, because mobile phones enable companies to offer a special offer to each user based on previous purchasing history, locations and other important data. Examples of large brands who use this will be shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Examples of large brands and their strategies

Lego + McDonald's, Sony, Warner Brothers	Video game <i>Lego Batman</i> whose main characters were sold in <i>McDonalds' Happy Meal</i>
McDonald's	Using 600 California Franchises inviting children to send text messages via cell phone so they can get coupon for free <i>McFlurry</i> ice cream Advertised on buses, posters and even writing "Send McFlurry 73260" in the sky (<i>skywriting</i>)
KFC	In advertisements they used a high tone " <i>MosquitoTone</i> " that can only hear children and if children guess where exactly the high tone is used they get a 10\$ coupon for a chicken meal.
Coca Cola	"My Coke Rewards" program where consumers use special codes from the Coca Cola product and with that they can for example download the ringing sounds
Erste bank	Advertisements for children's savings in which main character is an animated bear although the children do not know the meaning of the word savings, but because of the song they like and the bear, they encourage parents to use it, at the end, that is the main purpose of this advertisement
Croatian Telecom	A commercial in which boy asks his mother what he will do at summer holiday at grandma's and she says send messages, be on internet, and then commercial addresses his parents to buy him 60GB mobile traffic

Source: Authors' table

From this table authors of this paper have concluded that in advertising and manipulation toward children, goes beyond all ethical and moral boundaries, all that because they want to sell the product.

There are many researches that prove how media manipulate children into buying some products.

Regarding ethical issues, the authors are already rather early, 1999., examining the effects of internet advertising on children.

An example is the research conducted by M. Jill Austin, Mary Lynn Reed (1999.) in their article Targeting children online: Internet advertising ethics issues highlighting the ethical issues of internet promotion.

For example Martin Lindstrom (2011.) in his research explains that Apple's marketers know that once mom or dad passes iPod Touch to their children, the child can't help but get hooked on the gizmo and will eventually be asking for Apple computer of their own. Also, he says that marketers increasingly advertise beauty products at kids. Lindstrom cites an NPD report that says that the percentage of girls age 8 – 12 who regularly use mascara and eyeliner doubled from 2007. to 2009. And now 18% for mascara and 15% for eyeliner. He also references Peggy Orenstein's book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, which says that half of 6 – 9 year old girls use lipstick and lip gloss and their parents spend more than 40 million dollars per month on beauty products.

Calvert in her research says: "Marketing practices such as repetition, branded environments, and free prizes are effective in attracting children's attention, making products stay in their memory, and influencing their purchase choices in future. Thus, public policy regulates how advertisers can interact with children via television, online environments are now and probably always will be less heavily regulated than more traditional media."

6. LEGISLATION ANALYSIS

Brands want to be successful and because of that they are targeting younger costumers, in order to succeed they are looking for new techniques to attract children but through them their parents too. However, the problem is that brands are rarely paying attention to ethics, and the limit in the consumer world rarely exists. This is why brands should ensure that market communications are applied with social and professional responsibility and they should act with fair market principles. Communication should not harm consumer confidence in marketing and should not contain statements or processing images or sounds that violate the standards of decency that people currently respect in the country. Brands should not take advantage of customer's trust or lack of knowledge or experience. (Lane et al, 2011., citat u Ferboković, 2015.) Children often understand things literally, and media characters play a big part in their life which is why marketing advertising is deceptive to them.

It can certainly be said that the media are involved in raising awarness of the importance of protecting the rights of the children and raising the standard of child protection in our society, and if a brand or media decides to participate in an unethical marketing project, they will face lawsuits and it will decrease their sales. Media strategy and media policy towards children are an integral part of the media strategy and policy in all developed democratic countries in the world, and with development of the media industry, market laws and globalization, they are becoming more and more aware that children are exposed to content that is more suitable to adults than them, especially advertisements for tobacco products, alcoholic beverages and lottery games. Because of this, the companies should be aware that they influence on social and cultural behaviors of children through the market performance. Very often products increase self-confidence in children, especially clothing and IT products, which is why an increasing problem of materialism has emerged among the youngest population, and children are more and more focused on consumption rather than on real life values. (Crane, Kazmi, 2010.) Many countries want to protect their children from the negative impact of television and other advertising, so they have numerous advertising laws. Strenghtened provisions to protect children from inappropriate audiovisual commercial communications for foods high in fat, salt and sodium and sugars, including by encouraging codes of conduct at EU level, where necessary. Video-sharing platforms also have to respect certain obligations for the commercial communications they are responsible for and to be

transparent about commercial communications that are declared by the users when uploading content that contains such commercial communications.

More flexibility in television advertising. Instead of the current 12 minutes per hour, broadcasters can choose more freely when to show ads throughout the day, with an overall limit of 20% of broadcasting time is maintained between 6:00 to 18:00 and the same share allowed during prime time (from 18:00 to midnight).

The media landscape has shifted dramatically in less than a decade. Instead of sitting in front of the family TV, millions of Europeans, especially young people, watch content online, on demand and on different mobile devices. Global internet video share in consumer internet traffic is expected to increase from 64% in 2014 to 80% by 2019. (European parliament, 2019.)

Although the control in this area is relatively weak in United States, legislation in Europe and Australia is much better. (Kuterovac, Jagodić, 2005.) The rights of the children in European Union have developed gradually and first were focused on specific aspects of economically and politically motivated initiatives that are related to children within the area of consumer protection, but recently children's rights are part of a coordinated European Union program. For the purposes of this paper, authors have researched how some of the major countries and Republic of Croatia regulate promotion for children. This will be shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Countries and their legislation

Country	Legislation
Republic of Croatia	The HURA codex of Advertising and Market Communication, paragraph 18., which states that: "In communication with children and young people, social behavior, lifestyles and attitudes should not be undermined. Products that are not suitable for children should not be advertised in the media intended for children or be released close to the places or areas where children are staying, especially in schools and kindergartens. Also inexperience and vagueness of children should not be exploited." Law and legality in Croatia limit the advertising and teleshopping of alcohol and alcoholic beverages and should not be directed directly to juveniles nor show juveniles how to consume such drinks
France	Banned advertising of alcoholic drinks to juveniles and their advertising on television programs or in cinemas
Sweden	When children watch the cartoon Pokemons, at the end of series they do not hear the jingle "You have to gather them all" that hear other kids in the world because of alluding to buy all Pokemon cards Since 1991., all television commercials for children younger than 12 years have been banned
Greece	It is totally forbidden to advertise toys like rifles, tanks and other war equipment, and advertising other toys is forbidden between 7 o'clock in the morning and 10 o'clock in the evening
England	Advertising for children is strictly forbidden, and advertising industry is regulated independently by national and international law. It is not allowed that the child feels inferior if he or she does not buy the product, it is not allowed to exploit the child's vice and companies have to be sure that with advertising they do not encourage the child to buy the product independently
Russia	It is proposed to abolish movies and cartoons that contain violence, such as Russian cartoon "Wolf and rabbit" and Tom & Jerry

Source: Authors' table

From this table, authors have concluded that children, because of their their susceptibility, delinquency, lack of life experience, have special protection in many countries and they do that by prohibiting and restricting market communications for many products and behaviour.

It should still be mentioned that because of the nature of the media, it is difficult to control them, but not impossible. There are a numerous brands whose unethical behaviour was punished, and some of them will be shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Brands' unethical behaviour and punishment

Brand	Unethical behaviour and punishment
Kellog	Has put a series of falsehoods during the advertising of his cereals to emphasize the benefit of consuming such products, because of that his site was put off after the Advertising Board's pressure because his statements were not supported by licensed healthcare professionals
Weetbix	Offended children who did not eat their cereals and were banned from advertising

Source: Authors' table

Although practice has shown that it is difficult to control the content in which children were exposed, especially in the virtual world, the growing pressures point to the fact that advertising to children will experience major change and more and more countries will follow the example of Sweden. However, if we work together and if we actively engage in creating marketing strategy for big brands, we can protect our children.

Similar research was also carried out by Deborah Roedder John (1999.): "in which she review what we know about children's development as consumers. Her focus is on the developmental sequence characterizing the growth of consumer knowledge, skills, and values as children mature throughout childhood and adolescence."

7. DISCUSSION

Today we are exposed to large amounts of media every day, it is very difficult to keep track of all the unethical actions of advertisees and even more difficult to protect our children. Since we live in a time when advertising is allowed in schools, on the Internet, in children's shows, in sports competitions, parents can not stay close to their children in every moment of their lives so they can not always protect them. Because of this, brands daily exploit the vagueness and naivety of children and that become their main strategy, According to this, children become secondary consumers or "shadow cinsumers" that affect their parents' purchase. Children have a lack of life experience, so everybody try to legally protect them, but in all that, companies need to participate too. They have to introduce the product realistically and not earn profits based on abuse of trust or disruption of parental authority. Despite numerous codes and laws, this research has shown that lot of brands knowingly violate these laws and with that they are harming children. This is why it is very important to educate children how to interpret the content in the media. Although one part of these education is implemented within the education system, that is not enough because children often do not take that seriously, so it is crucial that parents raise their children and talk with them about this from the earliest childhood. We should also warn that if brands do not pay attention and make changes in advertising to children, the countries will be forced to ban advertising for children as it did Sweden. In order to be satisfied, both sides need to agree with each other, but an important question is, are large brands willing to give up profits or loyal future customers, and are parents ready to talk and educate their children about media.

So the main question we all need to ask is whether is it acceptable to advertise to children, and is it ethically correct to link brand and the child? In addition, it should be noted that unethical behaviour can only result in short-term success but will never become a basis for long-term profitability!

8. CONCLUSIONS

The subject that the authors of this article have explored is very complex and many researches who have been researching this topic over the last decade have failed to fully identify the consequences that media have on people lives, especially children. Despite that, the authors of this article have concluded that there are numerous studies of the harmful impact of media on children. That happens because children do not have enough life experience so that is why the media can easily manipulate them. It should be noted that although there are numerous laws and regulations that prevent the manipulation of children, big brands continue to succeed because children are exposed to the media on a daily basis. It is very important that parents and educators become mediators between children and the media because with that they shape children's attitudes, and then children will use them in the future. To achieve this, it is necessary to help people understand media content and they have to be competent in that. Except negative sides of media, it also have numerous positive sides, for example, they give information about events in our environment, but despite that, it is very difficult to ethically connect brand and child, and many people believe that brands should not advertise to children. But, as long as media have a direct role in the upbringing children, parents can only protect their children if they learn what is media and what media represent and with that they need education. In order to achieve this, all countries need to harmonize laws and regulations because if we do not work together, innocent children will be harmed, and they should actually build our future.

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